THE ROLE OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC CHURCH AND OF JAPAN IN THE ISSUE OF EAST TIMOR

—— VI Symposium on Timor of Oporto University ——

5th Oct.,1994

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First and foremost I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Alberto Amaral, President of Oporto University, for his kind invitation to attend such a highly-appreciated symposium. My gratitude also goes to Prof. Barbedo de Magalhães, Coordinator of this symposium, who has invited me to this annual symposium many times before and sent me its reports every year.

I would also like to give my warm greetings to my dear Timorese brothers and sisters living in Portugal. My prayers are always for you and your family members in East Timor, because I know how hard your lives and struggles are in the present situation of continuous human rights violations.

My dear audience,

It is indeed most precious for me to be able to come as far as Portugal to share with you my humble solidarity work with East Timor. You, Portuguese people, have been dealing with this very difficult and delicate issue of East Timor with all your might for so many years. I was able to witness your efforts indirectly when I visited East Timor last year and found a warm feeling towards Portugal within the hearts of all the Timorese. I feel very sorry for the fact that the freedom you were going to give to East Timor was taken away in such a brutal way by the militaristic government of Indonesia. May your efforts and the efforts of all the other European countries to bring back that freedom to East Timor be ever more vigorous. It is one of the most pressing responsibilities of all the disciples of Christ, the Lord of Peace, to work for the suffering people of East Timor.

It was in 1986 when we, the Japanese Catholic Council for Justice & Peace, started to work for East Timor. In that year the late Bishop of East Timor, Rev. Martinho da Costa Lopes, came to Japan to talk about East Timor, and his ardent speech moved us in such a way that we felt that it was a real call from our Lord to do something for our suffering sisters and brothers in East Timor.

Since then we have been working in cooperation with a citizen's group called the Free East Timor Japan Coalition, and gradually found our own role as a religious group within the whole solidarity network. We found it especially important to be in close connection with the Church of East Timor, because at the moment it is the only institution capable of representing the people of East Timor. It was just at that time when we got to know about Bishop Belo's letter to the Secretary General of the U.N., appealing for a referendom. I immediately took the opportunity to appeal to all the Asia-Oceanian church leaders for solidarity with Bishop Belo. Their responses

were more than we had expected, and I took those signatures of support, more than 1200 in number, to the Secretary General of the U.N. when I attended the hearing of its Decolonization Committee.

As I got to know more about the situation of East Timor, my desire to visit it and see the situation with my own eyes grew. This desire of mine came to be fulfilled when I visited East Timor last year. I saw Bishop Belo and others and was welcomed so warmly. I prepared my homily in Tetum, the language of East Timor, because I knew that the church there was doing their best to preserve the East Timorese tradition including the language. What I saw in East Timor during my visit was exactly the same as I had heard. The people were living in constant fear and longing for support from abroad.

Their wish to have more support from abroad, especially from other countries of Asia and Oceania was realized last June when the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor was held and gave an epoch-making push forward to the struggle for a free East Timor. Thanks to this conference nearly all the Asia-Oceanian countries have got to know what is happening in the tiny island of East Timor.

As a citizen of the same region of Asia, let me convey my sincere appeal to Indonesia. Although the Republic of Indonesia is founded on the most lofty principles, what Indonesia is doing to East Timor is totally against both these principles and International Law. It is also a clear violation of the spirit and the ideals of the United Nations, that is to say, to establish the right of self-determination in all the countries occupied by other countries. May all the Indonesian authorities awake to what they are doing against East Timor and stop immediately all the violences done there.

I would like to conclude this speech by expressing my strong support for all the endeavours which will be made within the newly-established justice and peace committee in East Timor. May the Lord Jesus Christ, the lack in whose suffering is being filled up by our dear brothers and sisters in East Timor, may guide their way with his abundant grace.

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Thank you very much.